

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, May 13, 2020

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Commissioners

Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Hector Elizalde
Thomas O'Shaughnessy
Joe Leal
Tom Lasser
Dennis Tucker
Ruel Fuentecilla
Michael McDowell
Tess Banko
Brittanie Moore

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley called the meeting to order at 1: 30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Brig. General Ruth A. Wong, Director, Military and Veterans Affairs.

Roll Call

There was a total of 10 Commissioners; there was a quorum. Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley asked for a moment of silence for Velma Moody who was the sister of Congresswoman Maxine Waters. She passed away due to COVID-19.

Approval of Minutes

Motion by Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley to accept the Minutes for March 11, 2020 and seconded by both Commissioners McDowell and Fuentecilla. All present were in favor. Motion approved.

Chairman's Report

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that all future meetings will be held via Teleconference until further notice. She stated that Commissioner O'Shaughnessy emailed her to remind everyone that elections were coming up, therefore, it will be on the next month's Agenda in June. General Ruth Wong suggested that a nominating committee be appointed. Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley appointed Commissioners Leal, Banko, and O'Shaughnessy as the committee. She added that they are to include Commissioner Moore so that she can become familiar with the process.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that there have been daily briefings for the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs; she has attended most of them and find that they are very informative.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that the Second District is planning to participate in a food distribution of an upscale restaurant and some perishable items from the food bank in honor of Memorial Day on Friday, May 22nd. It is important to serve the living by honoring the fallen. They are looking for other organizations to partner with them and need about 20 volunteers. More information to follow. The following Commissioners volunteered to assist with the food distribution event: Elizalde, O'Shaughnessy, and Fuentecilla. Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley will be in contact with Commissioner Banko due to her wealth of information. Commissioner Banko is happy to connect them with her network of resources.

The LA Collaborative was held earlier this morning, where Dr. Carl Castro gave a presentation about the affects of the coronavirus on the veteran community. The women's group had good information and resources for housing.

Homeless Update

Commissioner Elizalde provided an update on the Room Key Project which secures hotels and motels for the homeless community and veterans throughout the city. Homelessness has now been a priority and is moving towards permanent housing. The Democratic party proposed a trillion dollar package for state and local governments. The House of Representatives will vote on Friday.

Commissioner McDowell commented that the Hero's Act was worth reading and that he will send it out to all commissioners.

Commissioner O'Shaughnessy commented that it is very important to give appreciation for support to the homeless community. He suggested to give hotel management positive feedback and keep them in mind for future events.

Commissioner Elizalde agreed and stated that he asked LAHSA to provide a list of hotel participants and is looking forward to sending a letter of appreciation on behalf of veterans and the homeless community at large.

Commissioner Banko stated that SSVF providers are an alternative method of referrals to assist with housing for veterans. She will follow-up and send out information.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley commended all commissioners for their efforts and involvement in this very critical issue.

Adulting Classes

Commissioner Tucker reported that Dr. Laura Perez was unable to join the meeting today. She will brief the commission in June as to the next steps related to the adulting class.

Building and Tenant Update

Commissioner O'Shaughnessy briefed the commission about ongoing services being provided for veterans during the closure of Patriotic Hall. Assistance to the public is being done over the phone and postal mail is being handled by staff. The tenants are receiving updates in a timely manner through MVA Building Management. General Ruth Wong meets with MVA staff and provides them updates from the CEO of the County of Los Angeles.

Public Comments

None.

Guest Speakers

Anthony Rodriguez, CalVet, began by thanking the commission for inviting him. He shared that CalVet created a new website; please visit calvet.ca.gov. The website is now easier to navigate, is more appealing to the eye with lots of colors, and has lots of information. To stay relevant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CalVet has begun a series of webinars. The webinars have been taking place for several weeks and can be found on the website at calvet.ca.gov and by clicking on CalTap; the webinars are at the bottom of the page. There have been a number of webinars made available since April 2020. CalVet staff continues to provide services through telework, though the office in Sacramento is closed.

Tom Ruck, Director of the Los Angeles National Cemetery, was invited to provide the commission information about an upcoming event, but was not able to join today. General Ruth Wong gave the report on behalf of the Los Angeles National Cemetery. She reported that there will be a virtual Memorial Day event which will be televised on ABC 7 news. David Ono from ABC 7 will be the MC and General Yeager will be the Key Note speaker, and hopefully Mayor Garcetti will be the Featured speaker. The program is a great mix of information, education, and entertainment. As this is a very unique event, there will not be an audience. The veterans of Los Angeles deserve this and it is their honor to make it happen.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall closed on March 16 in order to adhere to the Safer at Home Order, therefore, all staff began teleworking. There were no COVID-19 cases. Staff has been offered online courses and trainings for both mandatory and professional development. Two staff members have been assigned as Disaster Service Workers. The departments Public Information Officer was assigned to the Joint Info Center. There are four staff members on medical leave, one staff member who just retired, and two reservists have been deployed. There has been an increase in phone calls for the department of more than 5,000 phone calls in April. We now have four extensions: 1 for benefits; 2 for college fee waivers; 3 for veteran services and driver's license designation; 4 for general information and building.

Los Angeles County has a severe budget deficit due to COVID-19 Health Order and void of sales tax (\$1 billion this fiscal year and \$1 billion next fiscal year). All departments are required to submit curtailment scenarios for 10–15 and 20 percent. The CEO and staff will evaluate programs and services within the next two weeks. The Legislative staff is working on advocating in Washington DC and Sacramento for additional funding especially for lost revenue. The match for 401 and 457K are suspended.

There have been COVID-19 briefings held daily by CEO and staff. There are seven working groups looking into recovery on what we need and how to open the County and eventually County buildings safely. It is important to take care of our staff and clients that we serve and maximize safety. DMVA has participated by completing multiple surveys and the County will continue with teleworking.

Awarded the Mental Health Service Act Prop 63 funding for FY 2020/2022 revised with a 5.5 percent reduction from \$400K to \$377,700 for transition assistance and outside the wire mental health services in Community Colleges. This adjustment is an effort to maximize the distribution of available funding to all counties considered for award.

The Culinary Arts Veterans Program that began in February was class cancelled and there is no information on when it will continue. The Community colleges and State colleges on campus classes have been cancelled at this time. Vincent Jackson is the point of contact for LATTC and he will provide an update as soon as he knows.

CACVSO funding supported by Senator Archuleta championing a request of \$5.4 million to help COVID-19 impacted and homeless veterans budget ask process; the Senator and staff are working with the Governor's Council and made a direct request to the Governor's staff.

The Safe Parking Program at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall began at the end of April to include RVs. There 10 spaces for veterans and 10 spaces for residents. There are several vehicles that are parked each night in our parking lot. To date, recruitment for additional vehicles for the program continues.

The Census 2020 program has been extended until April 2021. We continue to work on media coverage through our social media outlets and through our email server list.

MVA is working with Montgomery Hom in planning a virtual event for the Chinese Americans veterans of WWII who served during the European and Pacific theatre of operations and received the Congressional Gold Medal. This virtual event will be held in September 2020.

The National Veterans Foundation has added a new Women's Veteran Outreach Coordinator named Martha Varela who is just about launching the program. General Ruth Wong suggested to the Chair that Martha be invited as a guest speaker for the meeting so that she can brief the commission about what she is doing to help women veterans.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Elections 2020
- Martha Varela, National Veterans Foundation as a guest speaker
- Banko suggested that someone come to brief on the impact on veterans and families
- Commissioner Fuentecilla suggested a Mike Saloni from Save a Warrior program be invited as a guest speaker
- Commissioner Elizalde recommended that EDD attend and brief about how veterans will be assisted with unemployment; Commissioner Leal, Commissioner O'Shaughnessy and General Ruth Wong each have a point of contact who can provide information from EDD.

Follow-Up on Veteran Issues

None.

Good of the Order

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley expressed her gratitude towards the staff at MVA for setting up the teleconference meeting and helping to work through the kinks. The meeting went very well, especially for it being the first time. General Ruth Wong is hopeful that the next commission meeting will be done through Skype.

Commissioner Leal agreed with the Chair and wanted to thank the MVA staff with the assistance for veterans benefits because they are still able to help while working remotely. General Wong thanked Commissioner Leal and assured him that she would pass along to her staff.

Vice Chair Elizalde also thanked MVA staff and encouraged everyone to continue to reach out to the community.

Commissioner Banko stated that May 25th will be the Veterans Community Oversight Engagement board meeting which will be held virtually; will forward the login information. She is currently working on a lot of webinar material that is prevention based due to the pandemic. The referral system to VPAN is very useful to the veteran community. She put together a list of emergency numbers and resources that she will share with everybody that may be helpful.

Commissioner O'Shaughnessy stated that the LA Collaborative has been discussed by few commissioners. He is currently the Vice Chair of CVEB and Commissioner Banko is the Vice Chair. MVA staff is appreciated for all the work they are doing while working remotely.

Commissioner Lasser is glad that the meeting went better than he expected. On Friday, the Airforce Thunderbird's are going to do fly over of Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange County; the military arranged to thank the first responders and all the healthcare providers. The Coast Guard is going to do their change of command at Terminal Island on May 21, 2020 and LA Air Force base is changing command on July 15, 2020; both will be taking place virtually.

Commissioner McDowell stated that last week he sent out a notice about the launch of the Residential Living Community program for veterans in San Antonio. This program will offer training, wraparound holistic services and is all-inclusive. There are about 200 residents and will open in August 2020.

This was the first virtual meeting due to pandemic and there were a total of 15 attendees. Meeting adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero
Secretary
May 13, 2020